

March 2, 2015

Dear Members of the CT Appropriations Committee,

I have been an active member of the Coventry STEPS Collaborative since 2010. Coventry STEPS is a 50+ member organization that links professionals in the community (Board of Education, Town employees, and early childhood providers) with community members and parents to ensure that ALL Coventry children are Nurtured, Healthy and Engaged and Successful Learners. Coventry STEPS depends on the funding from the State Office of Early Childhood and the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund to operate.

The Coventry STEPS Collaborative has had many important successes over the last 6 years.

These successes include, but are not limited to:

Coventry STEPS has developed important and relevant ways to communicate with parents about events and resources available in the community. Some examples of these communications include the Town of Coventry Early Childhood Resource Guide, a website, and a Facebook page. Coventry STEPS has a partnership with the Town Clerk's office to send out a birth packet to all families who have a new baby. The packet is filled with valuable local and state resources that can help a family connect with the services and programs they may need. Included in this packet is the Early Childhood Resource Guide.

Coventry STEPS has worked hard over the past several years at connecting parents with one another. Coventry is a small, semi-rural town and parents of young children consistently report feeling isolated and lacking a social supports (myself included). One of the goals of Coventry STEPS is the development of a Family Resource Center, which would offer consistent parental support, educational opportunities, and opportunities for families with young children to connect with one another during the most critical time in a child's development, birth –age 3. This past year, Coventry STEPS worked closely with the Superintendent of Coventry Schools to spearhead a Preschool Feasibility Committee. The committee produced a report about the current conditions of preschool programming and the need to expand those offerings, as well as create a Family Resource Center.

Coventry STEPS has supported many local early literacy initiatives, including advocating for the local library to expand library hours for young children, distribution of board books, and advocating for additional reading support in the schools. Additionally, Coventry STEPS helped make the connections between the schools and local library staff for the improvement of our local summer reading program.

Coventry STEPS has also worked diligently to secure additional grant funds to expand the scope of our work. We have offered the course People Empowering People through the University of Connecticut for the last two years. Fifteen Coventry parents have participated in these two classes. Coventry also secured grant funding to collect data from the yellow health forms (preschool students) to better understand the health needs of very young children.

Coventry STEPS has worked to support better health among all Coventry children. Our Health Committee raised the awareness of the outdated School Wellness Policies, which have since been updated. Coventry STEPS has worked closely with Parks & Recreation and the Coventry

Public Schools to increase physical fitness opportunities. Due to these efforts, Coventry has seen tremendous improvement in the percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students passing all 4 physical fitness tests.

Coventry STEPS has raised the importance of early childhood to a new level and has brought many key stakeholders along with parents together to discuss local issues and find solutions. It is essential to maintain the funding for Early Childhood Collaboratives in the OEC budget to ensure that this very important work continues.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

Jillian Miner  
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